

Allegorical Significance of Characters in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

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Abstract. William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* tells the story about a group of young boys who were lost in an uninhabited island after an airplane- crash. The boys hope to be rescued from the island but their hope is lost and barbarism takes over. Golding's background of knowledge to write this novel was based on his own experiences during the Second World War. The characters in *Lord of the Flies* pose recognizable allegorical significance, which make them as the sort of people around us. Ralph stands for civilisation and democracy; Piggy represents intellect and rationalism; Jack signifies savagery and dictatorship; Simon is the incarnation of goodness and saintliness. All these efficiently portray the microcosm of that society.

Keywords : Allegorical significance; civilization, rationalism; savagery.

The English Nobel Laureate, Sir William Gerald Golding (1911-1993) got his first novel, *Lord of the Flies* published in 1954. Like many other contemporary novelists Golding is also influenced by the annihilation and aftermath of the Second World War. The novelist creates a microcosm dominated by the evil impulses inherent in human beings. *Lord of the Flies* depicts the transformation into savagery of a group of English school boys stranded on a desert island without adult supervision in the aftermath of a plane crash. At the beginning, the children managed to take care of themselves and expected the hope of rescue. However, the boys are soon controlled by the fear in their hearts. The island community breaks up into two rival groups, represented respectively by Ralph, who insists on civilised values and the hope of rescue; Jack, who wants to enjoy the freedom and benefits of hunting on the island. Eventually, the paradise-like island is destroyed in fire of cannibalism. The school boys are rescued and reverted from savages to obedient school boys on the arrival of an English cruiser when he was in his business of fighting another cruiser.

The characters in *Lord of the Flies* possess recognizable traits that make them individuals as the sort of people that everyone has known in school and society, and become convincingly embodiment of particular aspects of human nature.

Ralph stands for civilization and democracy. He is the charismatic protagonist of the novel. He leads and accommodates others in terms of the fondly cherished, moderate English tradition. Ralph, the representative of civilization and democracy, lives by rules, acts peacefully and follows moral commands and values the good of the group, who dramatically reveals the condition of civilization and democracy in Golding's time. Driven by his instinct of civilization and

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democracy, Ralph wants to set up a civilised utopia for all the boys on the island. He blows the conch and summons the deserted children together. He suggests the boys making a chief by voting, which shows his thought of law, order and democracy. After he is elected as the chief, he makes rules of speaking; Ralph tries to have the boys preserve the civilised living principles.

Although he is the only one who worries about the welfare of the other boys and his instinct of civilization survives longer than any other character. He is not resolute and decisive when facing the problems. Since he becomes a leader, Ralph is determined to seek way for rescue by keeping a signal fire for attracting a passing ship. But with the appearance of Beast from water, Ralph is confused in despair to ask a sign from that ruined world. In “Beast from Air”, after their exploration his intelligence is crippled by fear, so they keep a signal on the rock instead on the top of the mountain. When Jack challenges his authority, Ralph doesn’t give a firm counterattack, he even wants to give up the position of chief, and takes part in the feast of Jack and in killing Simon. To a great degree, Ralph helps the expanding of savagery.

If we set the story against the social background during Second World War, it is easy for us to find the boys in the novel from the politicians at that time, “If Ralph is Chamberlain and Jack Hitler, Roger is the Gestapo”.(Olsen,14) This kind of comparison is seemingly surprising to us, but as a matter of fact there is something reasonable in it. Chamberlain was British Prime Minister before the war, who took a policy of appeasement towards Hitler aggression. It is his diplomatic policy that should be partly responsible for Hitler’s expansion, which finally caused the greatest tragedy in the history of the world. There is something similar between Ralph and Chamberlain. Ralph is the chief among the boys, but when Jack challenges his authority, he in most cases is reluctant to fight against Jack. He has such a capability but he fails to make use of it. He could challenge Jack physically and defeat him once and for all; he could lend Piggy more assistance in forming coalition. Yet he does nothing and even thinks to “give up being chief”.

But, to our relief, Ralph is aware of the reason of the savagery at the end of the novel. When he is hunted by the “hunters”, Ralph has found the Lord of the flies- the Beelzebub. He smashes the Beelzebub, and he grows mature and begins to be aware of the region. So, at the end, when the officer rescues him, Ralph weeps, “for the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy”(Golding, 223). Though he fails in striving for the returning of the values of civilization, it is not only his fault. It is the failure of mankind to deal with the forces of evil. Some critics say that Golding is a sheer pessimist.

Piggy embodies all the qualities of civilised society, a strong sense of adherence to justice and morality, rational, sequential thought, experimental creativity, and a desire to focus the society towards long term survival and prosperity.

Piggy is indeed a moral person with clear vision of justice and good, to which he believes the entire world must adhere to. Piggy takes a scientific and rational attitude towards life. When the fear of Beast confuses them, Piggy speaks that life is scientific. (92)

Piggy suggests the real fear is the fear of people. His forward- looking imagination sees things very clearly as they will be. He senses the evil people, but he can do nothing. When the “hunters” worship the God- the Lord of the flies, the science and rationalism keep him from participating in the superstition of the other boys and keeps him standing with Ralph. Piggy’s near-site implies that his intelligence is limited. Simon is aware that man is heroic and sick, but for Piggy man is not ill, man just has a foolish but corrigible habit of following Jack (fascist) if Jack should be taking Piggy’s sensible advice. He doesn’t realise that fascism overwhelms and will kill anything they want to.

Jack represents evil and violence, the dark side of human nature. From the beginning of the novel, Jack desires power above all other things. From his appearance, Jack is always associated with shadows and obscurity, and his frustrated angry eyes reveal his mind. From the start of the story, he claims to hunt for meat. He wants to share the pleasure of conquest and killing more than eating meat as he recalls, “He has outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, and taken away its life like a satisfying drink”(76). With the expanding of the bloodlust, Jack becomes more and more savage and violent. Under the enforcement of savagery, he has already forgotten the distinction between animals and men, as do primitives. He leads the hunters not only to kill pigs but also to kill his companions such as Simon, Piggy and nearly Ralph. As Alastair Niven puts it :

Jack represents more completely than anyone else in the novel, the theme of ‘reversion to savagery’ and he finds that behind the disguise of paint and mask he can assume a more self-confident personality (Niven, 48).

On the other hand, Jack is a totalitarian, an authoritarian man-of-power who despises assemblies and conch, and becomes an absolute ruler of his tribe in the end. When he appears at the assembly, he shows the desire of power and authority as he claims with simple arrogance, “I ought to be chief, because I am chapter and head boy. I can sing, C Sharp”(Golding, 23).

Thus, the character of Jack not only shows us how the primitive desire and actions are released where there are no restrictions of civilization but also what a dictator would have done or would do when driven by his evil power and lust for blood.

Simon is the most mysterious character of the novel. He is the first character to suspect that all is not well on the island. Simon stands on a different plane from every other character in the novel. Why? During Second World War, William Golding witnessed the expenditure of human ingenuity in the old ritual of war. As the illusions of his earlier rationalism and humanism fell away, he concluded:

the shape of society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable.
(Baker, 23)

He illustrated it in *Lord of the Flies*. In a way, Simon represents the future ideal personality of Golding. Therefore, Simon stands higher than any other characters. In the eyes of William Golding, Simon is a saint as he has described, "Simon is a Christ-figure...a lover of mankind, a visionary. (Niven, 49)

Simon is endowed with insight into the unchanging nature of human beings and communities, which is also why he is a so affirmative a figure on Beelzebub's island among sadist and savages. When the children on the island have got themselves into hell of mess, Simon "thinks of the beast, there rose before his inward sight the picture of human at once heroic and sick". (Golding, 113) With the knowledge of human evil, Simon seems to have consigned himself to the fate as Christ has done, when the boys are confused about the beast of air, Simon is the real skeptic and he suggests "I think we ought to climb the mountain". (140)

What is more important is that Simon alone with his inner vision, climbs the mountain to explore the evil without any awareness of losing his life or anything. It is his belief in spiritual reality that diminishes his fear of death, and he enters the dark forest without any fear of strange "beast". Through the dialogue with the *Lord of the Flies*, Simon has been aware what is the beast, and has discovered the dead parachutist. Simon has found the truth that the imaginary beast is "harmless and horrible". (162)

In his martyrdom, Simon meets the fate of all saints. Simon's obsequies are those of hero, saint, martyr, an essentially religious affair. His death occurs while the island cowers under the lash of a gigantic storm. As we pass from the horror of Simon's murder, from the storm's rage, and ritual's frenzy, to the absolution of cleansing, healing nature, we pass from the atmosphere of tragedy to the glorification of saint.

Lord of the Flies is a perfect example of allegory. Allegorical aspects are achieved in terms of character portrayal, narrative method, events and theme. Golding was a contemporary of Adorno and Horkheimer for whom the enlightenment of rationalism was nothing but a mass deception. 'Reason' is nothing more than a 'Construct' set against 'Unreason'. He feels that 'civilization' emerged

after the enlightenment is nothing more than a mask which covers evil inherent in human nature.

Each and every character in the novel represents something more than his self. They symbolise certain ideas. Each character stands for historical personages and at the same time they represent a part of human nature. It achieves political, religious and psychological significance at same time and becomes allegory of humanity as a whole.

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